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SUBJECT: "NO TO WAR, YES TO A NEW SUDAN" - THE SPLM NATIONAL
CONVENTION

¶1. (SBU) The SPLM National Convention - the party's second in 14 years - kicked off May 15 with great fanfare. 1720 delegates elected via successive grassroots contests at the boma, payam, county, and state-level converged on Juba to craft a new executive structure for the party - the first intra-Movement elections in the history of the SPLM. Scheduled to last through May 19, the Convention also serves to finalize policy platforms utilized in future election campaigns, reaffirm the SPLM's commitment to the vision of a more equitable, democratic "New Sudan," and focus on methods by which the technical implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement can be strengthened. The party is also expected to establish a road-map for its role in the resolution of the Darfur crisis and to craft the SPLM position on the 2009 elections, including how to resuscitate the languishing draft National Elections Law.

¶2. (SBU) Secretary General Pagan Amun, due to depart Sudan in less than a week following President Kiir's "him or me" ultimatum to the party, helped open the convention by leading the delegates in a rousing chorus of liberation songs prior to the formal speeches. Amun put on a brave face throughout the day's events, appearing to challenge SPLM Party Chairman Kiir only once - with an exaggerated handshake at the close of the session. Shouts of "Kiir will bring change, change to a New Sudan" and "The Sudanese identity is a Democratic Identity," and "Welcome, welcome New Sudan" punctuated pauses between speakers. A majority of speeches referenced the key role played by the U.S. government in forging the CPA and its past support to the SPLM.

¶3. (SBU) An already euphoric crowd was enlivened by Convention Chairman James Wani Igga's lengthy riff on Sudan's history of failed North/South peace agreements "made of shit" before noting that anyone believing the CPA could be placed in the same category had "better reconsider their thinking." To great laughter, the folksy Igga said the U.S. had ensured the success of the CPA by telling the parties, "if you can make peace, that's great, and if you cannot, we have a plan B we can put into effect." Igga diverged from his wittily sarcastic review of North/South relations and the health of the SPLM to make a serious point about food security, noting that the South is nearly 100% dependent on importation - an untenable degree of dependency given current worldwide concern about available grain supplies.

¶4. (SBU) The crowd was stony silent - but respectful - during the congratulatory speech by GNU Vice President and NCP Vice Chairman Ali Osman Taha. Taha, speaking as a representative of the NCP, called for Sudan's continued unity, acknowledged the continued difficulties encountered implementing the CPA, and reaffirmed NCO commitment to the NCP/SPLM partnership forged by the Naivasha peace process. "We need you for the stability of the Sudan and in order that we can continue to deliver the riches of the CPA." His review of NCP efforts on the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement and his attempt to discuss NCP action to address the situation in Darfur and drew heckles from the SPLM delegates from the East and Darfur.

15. (SBU) Assistant to the President Minni Minawi, speaking before Taha, received a considerably warmer welcome, with Vice Chairman Malik Agar reminding the delegates that "as long as Darfur bleeds, all Sudanese are bleeding." While offering congratulations to the SPLM, Minnawi's speech mostly pressed for awareness of Sudan Liberation Movement efforts to adhere to the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), the establishment of the Darfur Reconstruction and Development Fund, and drew unintended laughs when he asserted there remained room in the agreement for additional signatories. He thanked the SPLM for its leadership following the JEM attack on Omdurman, emphasizing that Khartoum's inability to maintain its DPA commitments had spawned the insurgency. Minnawi drew considerable applause when he called on the NCP to stand with the SLM in its efforts to continue forward with DPA implementation, threatening that "if you do not, I can assure you that the SLM will not continue to endeavor alone."

16. (SBU) Sudanese political parties from North and South offered accolades for SPLM leadership, and called for the party's continued commitment to the CPA. The representative of USAP 2 presented Lincoln's address at Gettysburg as a corollary to the present period in the SPLM's transformation, with Umma praising the SPLM for its continued advocacy for Sudan's marginalized, noting "there is no stability without equality." Eastern Front representatives recalled their past alliance with the SPLA and reaffirmed their support for the SPLM as it "used this Convention to chart a new path for peace." The Democratic Unionist Party reminded the audience of the current unrest in Abyei, intoning that "permanent peace in the Sudan depends on a strengthened relationship between North and South. The USAP 1 representative was the only speaker to deviate sharply from a message centered on the SPLM/NCP partnership or a unified Sudan, calling for the crowd's vocal endorsement of separation in 2011

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"lest we remain captives of Khartoum." The response from delegates representing all of Sudan (North and South) was not what he hoped for. Also present were visitors from many African parties (ANC, SWAPO, ZANU-PF) and some governments (Egypt, Eritrea, Libya), EU Special Envoy Torben Brylle, and Juba-based diplomats. CDA Fernandez was the only Khartoum-based COM present.

17. (SBU) SPLM Chairman Kiir haltingly delivered an expansive, weighty keynote speech intended to lay out the direction of the SPLM over the next three years of CPA implementation, with a heavy emphasis on party unity and adherence to the national vision of the party. Kiir began by tracing the origins of the movement and recognizing the fallen heroes of the movement. The overall emphasis of Kiir's speech was to emphasize founding father John Garang's vision of a New Sudan that would respond to the "legitimate demands of southern Sudan and the marginalized regions in our country." Kiir recalled the first party convention held in 1994, which separated the civilian and military functions of the movement and established the governing institutions that guided the party in its early years. Kiir diverted from the text of his speech twice - first to give emphasis to current struggles within the party, and then to recognize the gravity of the ongoing conflict in Abyei. On the first point, Kiir promised that all senior leadership positions in the party, including his own, would henceforth be elected democratically, and called on all leaders in the party to adhere to the wishes of party membership. Referring to the current "restructuring" of the party leadership, Kiir noted that "some of us may lose in the process of elections to key positions." On the second point, Kiir noted the ongoing fighting in Abyei in the context of the urgent need to fully implement the CPA. Other than urging CPA implementation and an end to the "Old Sudan" characterized by racism, intolerance, and instability, and wars, Kiir was at times conciliatory toward the North and made a special point of thanking GNU Second Vice President Ali Osman Taha for his role in negotiating the CPA, and also recognized GNU Presidential Assistant Ghazi Sallahudin for his role in negotiating the Machakos protocol. (Note: Both Taha and Sallahudin were present for the first day of the convention. End note.) With regard to national priorities, Kiir declared that the SPLM must prepare for elections, and must contribute to solving the crisis in Darfur. With regard to southern priorities, Kiir committed himself to stamping out corruption and promoting additional development.

¶8. (SBU) Acting CG spoke on behalf of the Charge, who departed Juba on the convention-chartered plane along with other delegates flown in from Khartoum. Invoking references to the U.S. government's legacy of solidarity with the Sudanese people, USG contributions during the Naivasha peace talks, and President Bush's commitment to the CPA, Acting CG called for continued SPLM leadership within Sudan. "This Convention marks the SPLM's final step in becoming a national party - and the SPLM forged during the next five days will find an expectant world outside its door. We will look to you to bring change in Sudan, now and through elections, though consistent advocacy for Sudan's marginalized, and through continued robust implementation of the CPA. We will expect the SPLM to say no to war - no to war in Darfur, no to war in Abyei, and elsewhere where it threatens. Just as your Chairman has continued to demonstrate his leadership - even as recently as during the past weekend's events in Omdurman - we will expect such leadership by the SPLM to continue - from Kutum to Kassala, from Juba to Merowe, and in Khartoum."

¶9. (SBU) Pro-bono GOSS consultant and former Special Representative for the Deputy Secretary on Sudan Roger Winter followed, with a speech reminiscent of John Garang. Winter recalled the SPLM's past struggle, but reminded the party of its equally important "future duties." "The vision of a New Sudan is a vision of hope for all Sudanese. North, West, South, East and Center, they all need liberation," he noted. "If 2001 leads to separation, those who will leave will never truly be free - as long as your brethren elsewhere are the slaves of Khartoum." Referencing evolving political fallout in the wake of the SPLM's final INC meeting, Winter called on the delegates to "keep in mind reasonable compromises may be necessary," and warned to loud applause that "substantial disunity within the SPLM will kill the vision of New Sudan."

¶10. (SBU) Comment: Day one of the SPLM Convention displayed a rightfully proud political party on the cusp of a historic transformative process. Despite delays linked to internal issues and JEM's attack on Omdurman, the event was well organized and oriented toward maximum inclusively that catered largely to the delegate's from Sudan's North. With the exception of SPLM Chairman Kiir's speech, the majority of the speakers used Arabic as the lingua franca for all delegates, and repeated references were made to Darfur and its intrinsic link to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The overall theme of the day was the party's commitment to the vision a "new Sudan" and a national vision. Only Kiir's remarks belied the challenges that lie ahead: internal power

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struggles and fresh violence in Abyei. These challenges could quickly erase the momentum gained at the Convention, but the mood on the first day was optimistic, and both the speeches and the visual presentation - senior leaders chatting amiably on the podium - with the telling exception of Kiir and Machar - showcased an energetic and seemingly unified party.

FERNANDEZ